

COPING - DEVELOPING OF THE IDEAS: A LITERATURE OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPTION OF COPING

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ABSTRACT

Coping is a term in psychology describing strategies for handling difficult situations entered into practice through cognitive psychology. The article addresses the emerging theory of stress by R. Lazarus, presents the Transactional theory and analyzes the differences in the conceptual apparatus that defines adaptability and mental well-being of the individual.

Key words: stress, transactional theory, coping strategies, cognitive appraisal

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years the term "coping strategy" is entering into the psychological terminology in the definition of capacity to deal with problem situations for the individual. The term introduced in 1966 in the transactional theory of the cognitive psychologist Richard Lazarus, studying stress. In an attempt to determine the adaptability of the coping the nomenclature was extended by introducing new definitions. In some cases they overlap, contradict each other, which requires a detailed examination of the matter.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We reviewed the literature in the focus of the coping conception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In his model, Lazarus integrate search of W. Cannon in the principles of homeostasis with de-

scribed by H. Selye "biological stress syndrome"(3), modified by the psychodynamic tendencies, the views of the behaviorists and the opinions of the cognitive psychology. Here the response to stress is considered in the context of emotion, the individual as an active participant in the process and found that self-regulation of personality components (cognitive, behavioral and emotional) can alter the effects of the stressor (16).

According transactional theory of Lazarus, the structure of the process includes three components: variables antecedents (environment and individual characteristics), the mediator process (primary appraisal, secondary appraisal and coping with appraised as stressful situation) and output variables (short-term effects: psychological changes occurring positive or negative emotions and adaptation response and the corresponding long-term effects in areas of somatic health, mental well-being and social functioning). Among the primary appraisal events are assessed as a threat, harm/loss or challenge. In the secondary appraisal the individual is seeking potential response of estimated event and includes assessment of own resources to redress the balance with the environment.

Coping is a cognitive or behavioral effort in response to emerging external or internal requirements assessed as stressful. In his transactional the-

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ory Lazarus divides it into two major groups: problem- focused coping and emotional- focused (or cognitive) coping. While at first, by taking action, there is desire to change the issue and control of the situation, then the second includes basic thought processes and emotional expression in response to a problem situation.

The first group of strategies describes behavior facing the problem and impact on stressors to eliminate its influence, change one's own attitude towards the source of the stress, i.e., active coping is aimed at changing the actual relationship between the individual and the environment. Problem- focused coping includes specific strategies such as active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, seeking instrumental support. The second group of strategies (emotional - focused) includes avoiding attempts to directly address the problem and efforts to control, reduction of negative emotions, regulation of emotional distress. Emotionally - focused coping is aimed at changing the actual relationship and to change its meaning. Specific emotional - focused coping strategies are: the expression of emotions, denial, acceptance, seeking emotional support, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, turning to religion.

In the late 20th century notions of behavior, and, strictly, dealing with stress are influenced by social learning theory of Albert Bandura (8). In his theory of self- efficacy, the core of the theory of social learning, he assumes that by self-regulatory schemes and self- efficacy the individual can affect cognition, attitudes and motivation. So people exhibit and maintain a certain proactive or reactive behavior in dealing with stress.

Based on the concept of Bandura, Aspinwall and Taylor (6) formulate the theory of proactive coping. In this theory the coping process is not only situational and temporally deterministic, but is bound by a clear positive result for the individual. The authors introduce the term proactive coping- efforts to build resources designed to address the challenges and to promote personal growth and reactive coping- efforts to address or mitigate harm or loss; prior coping- efforts to deal with potential threats and preventive coping- building efforts to baseline resistance resources to deal with an event that may or may not

be realized in the future, i.e. before the occurrence of stressful stimulus.

In an attempt to learn coping and create tools to measure it, many scientists develop conceptual apparatus, based on the classic problem- focused and emotional- focused coping strategies of Lazarus. Billings and Moos (9) introduce the concepts of avoidant and active coping with adjoining subcategory of lower rank. Search for systematizing and creating a hierarchical structure of known coping strategies remains in pole model, using one of its features: active/ passive, participant/ observer, vigilance/ avoidance, engagement/ disengagement, focusing on the direction of individual to (toward or back) the stressor. Another type bipolar partition is "positive" and "negative" strategies depending on the type of emotion that the stressor causes. Many aspects of the process makes grouping in subcategory difficult. For example, prototypes of the action- coping "problem solving" and "active coping" is not only a general orientation to the stressor, but they are active and emotionally constructive, positive. Along with this, other active and constructive emotional responses such as "seeking support" included in the same group of effective strategies although with focus back to the stressor, like the passive "observation" and "adaptation". During this, emotional negative "rumination" and "aggression" are excluded from the group of the active coping, although the direction of the individual to the stressful stimulus. The prototype of the avoidant coping "denial" is directed back to the stressor, but has also a strong and negative emotional charge. The paradox is that the researchers pose and pro stressor oriented strategy, but with negative affect "expression of emotion" and along with that the positive "seeking emotional support" and "positive rethinking the situation" are not categorized in the large group of avoidant coping. A critical analysis of the literature indicates that the groups are heterogeneous, although the separation is based on the one - dimensional direction to the stressor.

In their taxonomy of coping, Rudolph et al. (19) use dimensions primary and secondary control and rejection of control. Under coping with primary control the authors specify behavior, oriented to influence causing stress inducements, and in coping with secondary control- change their own behavior under the influence of the stimulus. With dimension "no

control” they characterize the lack of any attempt to address. In the received groups the same partitioning is used in the indicator primary/ secondary control, yielding multiple subgroups. Thus coping strategies most closely related to the primary control are “problem solving” and “instrumental action” and to secondary control - “acceptance” and “cognitive restructuring”. In this coping structure the relationship of coping at the primary control in the context of the situation is emphasized, while secondary - in the context of the individual and thus are divided in alloplastic coping, focused on environment, and autoplatic coping, focused on itself (18). This perspective is not sufficiently comprehensive, primary and secondary controls are active categories with a general alternative, failure of control. Such a division of the “absorption” and “adjustment” (7), wherein the first term under the authors mean “transforming circumstances according to their preferences” and in the second “adjustment to the specific needs in the context of the situation”. Their dimensions are opposite “helplessness” and “perseveration”, respectively, in the sense of stagnant, rigid behavior. This model is not bipolar and defines learning and adaptation as synergistic.

Latack and Havlovic (15), Hobfoll (14) examined coping in the focus of social orientation and allow the following categories: prosocial (engage the society), asocial (manipulate others) and antisocial (acts against the stressor without the involvement of others). Orientation to the society, however, in itself is not functional dimension for categorization of coping strategies. Compass et al (11) amplify the differentiation of the coping of volitional controlled responses and those which are involuntary, automatic. This definition brings the views of the author to the theory of mental defenses S. Freud, which is undoubtedly fundamental of the development of these ideas about coping. As the coping is a reaction to the perceived threat, so defenses are response to the anxiety (5). In this spirit, Falvo (13) presents the coping as a defense mechanism, as a series of unconscious acts and consider it as ineffective while preventing the growth and development of the potential and leads to physiological or psychological damage. Cramer (12) distinguish the defense mechanism and coping, emphasizing the importance of the unconscious nature of the associated expression of pa-

thology and following the hierarchical structure of personality in the first and conscious nature of situational determined by expression within the norm for the latter, which are adaptive. With a focus on the future of personal development and the subjective experience of stress Petkova and Nikolikova (2) categorize the coping strategies into two large groups - effective, with the experience of control over the situation and inefficient building the pessimistic view of the future and lead to cognitive problems states of depression in the long term.

Previously described dichotomous presentation of coping is the result of the comparative analysis of the process of dealing through a single variable. Tobin et al (21) offer a three- level hierarchical model in which subcategory from each successive level is formed by a different parameter. So in the beginning is the parameter “activity against stressful situation” with the formation of two categories- engaging and disengagement coping. Each of these two categories are divided according to factors “focus on emotion” or “focus on problem”, resulting in four subcategory: emotionally engaged and disengaged and problem- engaged and disengaged coping strategies. The next level of these four subcategories form new eight specific strategies: problem solving and cognitive reconstruction in the subcategory of problem involved strategies, diversion and escape into fantasy in the subcategory of the problem disengaged strategies, emotional expression and support seeking in the subcategory of emotionally engaged strategies and self-blame and isolation in itself - as emotional disengagement. Similar multifactor hierarchical system offer Skinner et al (20). Based on the analysis of the existing literature to date for coping and the factors that influence it, the authors formed three large families. The first is based on the assessment of the opportunities to take control, the second arises from attachment theory Ainsworth of assessing the role of others in the process and the third is related to the assessment of autonomy. In each of these families the subsequent categories are divided according to initial assessment of the incentive as a threat or a challenge. So formed six subfamilies after assessment challenge or threat, regroup from the perspective- to the individual or to the situation with the formation of new twelve subfamilies, incorporating specific coping strategies: problem solving, information search,

helplessness, escape, autonomy, seeking support, isolation, delegation, adaptation, negotiation, subordination and opposition.

CONCLUSION

In an attempt to evaluate the adaptability of coping, researchers define it with multiple terms that overlap known parameters, but can not be used as absolute synonyms. At present there are prepared hundreds of questionnaires assessing an individual's coping in problematic situations implies different variables and answering some questions, they pose new. Diversity in views on coping confirm the complexity of the problem on the one hand and on the other, the subjectivity of the matter consonant of the fundamental idea of cognitive psychology that the person is not affected by the activating stimulus but the meaning which gives it.

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